POLS 1100: United States Government and Politics
Utah State University

Fall 2020
Professor Josh M. Ryan

Contact Info: josh.ryan@usu.edu
Office Hours: Please email me and we will find a time that works.
Class Time and Location: 10:30-11:45 a.m. Tuesday and Thursday. Some class sessions will be synchronous, others will be asynchronous.

Course Description
This course is meant to provide an introduction to American Politics. We will be examining political actors and the rules and institutions which govern their behavior. We will also discuss and analyze some of the important contemporary debates in American politics including political polarization, participation and deliberation, and majoritarian democracy versus republicanism. This course will examine politics from a scientific perspective; we will characterize political action and behavior in a systematic and empirical manner.

I have two goals for this class. The first is to introduce you to basic concepts about our system of government and how it works. While I realize most of you will pursue careers in areas other than political science, understanding the basic processes of American government is critical to being an active and informed citizen. I will emphasize how our institutions constrain political actors, the role of the American public in government, and why political actors (legislators, bureaucrats, interest groups, parties) behave the way they do.

The second goal of the class is to develop a greater understanding of important political issues. Not only should you have a basic understanding of how American government works, you should also be informed about the major policy and ideological debates within the country today. To this end, we will often discuss some of today’s important political issues with the purpose of helping you understand why these issues foster disagreement and how these disagreements may affect political outcomes. My hope is that by examining issues critically you will form your own opinions and develop the tools which allow you to evaluate future policy debates.

At the end of this course, students should understand the basics of American government. You will be prepared for more advanced classes in political science and related disciplines. Students will also have a basic understanding of the major policy debates within the country today. This will allow you to engage with other citizens and evaluate future policy disagreements from a more critical perspective.

This class, like many in political science, often deals with subjects that are controversial. Engaging with these issues is an important part of being an informed citizen and as such, we will not shy away from discussing controversial current events. This also means you should never feel embarrassed or afraid to share your opinion, even if it means disagreeing with other students in the class. However, each of us should remember that we have different experiences and different viewpoints. We must always be respectful of other students and other opinions. I take this policy very seriously and have zero tolerance for inappropriate, crude, disrespectful, or demeaning comments. I reserve the right to use an appropriate punishment for any student who engages in disrespectful behavior. This may include removal from the class, receiving a zero on participation for the semester, or being reported to university officials. Please speak with me promptly if you feel there is a civility problem in the classroom. See the USU Student Code of Conduct at
If you need to contact me or set up a time to talk, don’t hesitate to send me an email. I check my email at least once daily and usually multiple times per day. If you have questions or do not understand the material please seek help prior to an assignment due date. I view this class as collaborative and want to help all students maximize learning outcomes from the class. I will make every effort to respond to your email as soon as possible. During the normal work week, I promise to respond to an email within 24 hours. On the weekends, and during breaks, vacations, or holidays, I may not respond as quickly. In other words, if you email me Friday night, it is entirely possible I won’t respond until sometime Monday. If 24 hours have gone by during a normal work week and I haven’t responded, please email me again. It’s possible I lost/forgot about/never received the message.

Please see [http://www.usu.edu/provost/faculty/teaching/syllabus_resources.cfm](http://www.usu.edu/provost/faculty/teaching/syllabus_resources.cfm) for additional USU and course policies on academic freedom, the grievance process, sexual harassment, and the withdrawal and incomplete process.

**Reading**

The course has one required textbook:

Auto Access eBook: Revel Access w/Struggle for Democracy, 2018 Elections and Updates 12e by Greenberg

This course requires all-inclusive digital materials that are provided to you at a lower price than traditional printed materials. These materials are paid for through an “Auto Access Digital Materials” charge placed on your student account when you registered for the course. To access the materials, visit the Canvas course site. For more details, including dates, deadlines, and opt-out info, visit your student Auto Access Portal: [https://portal.verba.io/usu/login](https://portal.verba.io/usu/login)

There may also be additional reading that will either be emailed to you or given out in class.

**Course Requirements and Other Information**

This class is online, and lectures will be recorded and posted at the start of each week. The accompanying readings are most useful if they are completed before watching the lectures. Falling behind on the reading is the single easiest way to do poorly in this class. It is very difficult to catch up on the reading in the week before the test.

I will also hold a synchronous class approximately every other Thursday to answer questions, clarify any material, or assist with studying. I am happy to increase synchronous class sessions if demand exists.

Students are expressly prohibited from recording any part of this course. Meetings of this course might be recorded by the University. Students are expected to follow appropriate University policies and maintain the security of passwords used to access recorded lectures and other course materials. Recordings may not be reproduced, shared with those not in the class, or uploaded to other online environments. Professor Ryan is the copyright owner of the courseware; individual recordings of the materials on Canvas and/or of the virtual sessions are not allowed; and such materials cannot be shared outside the physical or virtual classroom environment.

There will be three tests (see below). The tests will cover both the readings and lectures. Anything mentioned in class or in the readings is fair game. This includes policy discussions, current events, and any other topics discussed in class but not mentioned in the reading. If you cannot take one of the tests at the normal time, you should drop the class. Make-up exams will be allowed at my discretion, and only under the most unusual
extenuating circumstances. The make-up exams will be essay format and will be given only in the week immediately after the test. If you miss more than one test you will not be allowed to make-up both. I will require documentation for any missed exam.

I will periodically send out emails to the class list. You are automatically subscribed to the list if you are enrolled in the class through your campus email account or other email you specify. The list will allow me to inform you of changes in assignments, the schedule or to attach additional reading. I cannot send emails out to an email account not recorded by the University. The USU preferred email listed is an official means of communication between myself and the students. If you have any questions, please see USU’s Email Communications Policy at [http://catalog.usu.edu/content.php?catoid=12&navoid=3142](http://catalog.usu.edu/content.php?catoid=12&navoid=3142) and/or talk to me.

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary. The most likely changes will be to the dates on the course schedule. This syllabus is not a contract and is subject to change at the sole discretion of the instructor as announced in class. Changes in the syllabus may be announced either through the email list or via Canvas.

The Americans with Disabilities Act states: “Reasonable accommodation will be provided for all persons with disabilities in order to ensure equal participation within the program.” If a student has a disability that will likely require some accommodation by the instructor, the student must contact the instructor and document the disability through the Disability Resource Center (797-2444), preferably during the first week of the course. Any request for special consideration relating to attendance, pedagogy, taking of examinations, etc., must be discussed with and approved by the instructor. In cooperation with the Disability Resource Center, course materials can be provided in alternative format, large print, audio, diskette, or Braille.

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**Grading**

There are four grades for this class: quizzes, and three midterms.

**Quizzes 25%**

There will be a reading quiz about once a week. Quizzes will be completed online and students are responsible for completing them within the allotted time period. There will be no makeup quizzes given if you cannot take a quiz for any reason. However, I will curve the quiz scores by taking the highest quiz score in the class as equal to 100% and dividing each student’s score by that. The material on the quiz will mostly consist of material from the reading so it is absolutely critical you keep up with the reading.

**Three Midterms, @ 25% each**

The format of the midterms will be multiple choice and be taken on Canvas. The last test is not a final and will not be cumulative (in the strict sense). The date of the tests are listed in the schedule below.

**Misc. Grading Information**

I will be happy to regrade anything with the understanding that the grade could be higher or lower than the original grade. In order to have me regrade something, you need to give me a written explanation of your specific concerns within one week. There will be no review sheet for the tests, but we will review in class.
There will be no extra credit assignments given or accepted.

Plagiarism and/or cheating will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Anyone caught plagiarizing or cheating will receive a grade of zero on the assignment and/or the course, and may be reported to the Vice President of Student Services. Please see the Student Code of Conduct at [http://www.usu.edu/studentservices/studentcode/article6.cfm](http://www.usu.edu/studentservices/studentcode/article6.cfm) for USU’s policies on plagiarism.

You must complete all assignments to pass the class.

**Schedule**

Please note this schedule is tentative. I reserve the right to change it or add or subtract readings or assignments.

*Week of Sept 1: The syllabus and introduction to collective action problems and the prisoner’s dilemma.*
Reading: TXT Chapter 1

*Week of Sept. 8: The Articles of Confederation and the Constitution*
Reading: TXT Chapter 2, Federalist 10 and 51; The Declaration of Independence; The Constitution

*Week of Sept. 15: Federalism and state and local government*
Reading: TXT Chapter 3

*Week of Sept. 22: Congress and redistricting*
Reading: TXT Chapter 11

*Week of Sept. 29: Congress and redistricting*
Reading: None

*Oct. 1: Exam 1*

*Week of Oct. 6: The Presidency*
Reading: TXT Chapter 12

*Week of Oct. 13: The Executive Branch*
Reading: TXT Chapter 13

*Week of Oct. 20: The Supreme Court*
Reading: TXT Chapter 14

*Week of Oct. 27: Civil Liberties*
Reading: TXT Chapter 15

*Nov. 3: Election discussion*
Reading: None

*Nov. 5: Exam 2*

*Week of Nov. 10: Public Opinion and Polling*
Reading: TXT Chapter 5
Week of Nov. 17: Voting, Campaigns and Elections
Reading: TXT Chapter 10

Nov. 24: Voting, Campaigns and Elections

Week of Dec. 1: Domestic Policies
Reading: TXT Chapter 17

Week of Dec. 8: Domestic Policies and Summary
Final on Tuesday, December 15 at 9:30 am